

# Whopper

## INSIGHTS

By Ron Wilson



LARRY JAEGER

Marcus Christianson, Bismarck, with a 15-pound northern pike caught near Beulah in 2005 with his grandfather, Larry Jaeger.

*This is what we know: In 2005, an angler caught and released a northern pike as long as a fourth-grader is tall; Lake Ashtabula was the only water to produce two walleye weighing 10 pounds or more; and 65 paddlefish of 70 pounds or more were snagged from the Upper Missouri River as compared to 12 from the Yellowstone.*

This information must be put into perspective, however, as it was gleaned from the North Dakota Whopper and Catch and Release clubs. Meaning: We're simply disclosing those 2005 fishing exploits reported to club record-keepers – and nothing more. Maybe there was a bigger pike caught in 2005 than the 50-incher from Sakakawea; maybe Ashtabula wasn't the only water to produce a pair of double-digit walleye (weighing in at 11 pounds, 4 ounces and 10 pounds, respectively); and the pounds of paddlefish hauled from the Yellowstone is probably more than reported.

Nonetheless, a casual wade through the clubs' numbers does provide some insight as to what went on in 2005 on North Dakota waters. And if you had the time, patience and younger eyes, you could examine countless

figures accumulated over decades. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department started its Whopper Club in 1960, followed by the Catch and Release Club in 1983. Both are institutions catered to by many, but not by all. Some anglers, for whatever reasons, keep their catches and honey holes to themselves.

### Best Bite

To qualify for Whopper and Catch and Release clubs, fish must meet weight and length requirements. Meeting the standards isn't a gimme, either. For example, the minimum Whopper weight for walleye is 8 pounds and Catch and Release length is 25 inches. For some anglers, that's a career fish. For others, it's yet another notch in their cork-handled spinning rods.



11"  
Bluegill



13"  
Yellow perch  
Crappie



16"  
White Bass  
Smallmouth bass

CATCH AND RELEASE RULER



Tim Johansen, Beulah, caught this 31-pound, 11-ounce brown trout in the Missouri River in 2005. Johansen's fish is a state record.

In 2005, nearly 180 walleye of 25 inches or longer were caught and released in Lake Sakakawea, while Devils Lake boasted 124 fish in the same category. For northern pike, which has a 32-inch Catch and Release Club minimum, 62 fish qualified from Sakakawea and 21 at Devils Lake.

If you have the time to break some of this information down, what you'll learn is that 93 of Sakakawea's Catch and Release Club walleye qualifiers were caught in June and July and 67 for Devils Lake in the same two months. The bite is the best, hands down, in June and July on these two waters (and others?), according to club recordings, which probably comes as no surprise to most

veteran anglers. But for those just starting out, this information qualifies as a fishing tip.

Interestingly, the two heaviest walleye recorded in 2005 didn't come from either of the state's two most hallowed waters. Even so, Sakakawea and Devils Lake still figured in the mix. Here's a look at the top five:

- 12 pounds, 6 ounces – Red River (eastern North Dakota).
- 11 pounds, 4 ounces – Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County).
- 10 pounds, 6 ounces – Devils Lake.
- 10 pounds, 6 ounces – Kota-Ray Dam (Williams County).
- 10 pounds, 5 ounces – Lake Sakakawea.

For what it's worth I: Only the Kota-Ray Dam walleye was caught (July 29, 2005) during the June-July stretch we bragged about earlier. The others came in either fall or winter. So go figure.

For what it's worth II: A 31-inch walleye caught and released (in June) from Devils Lake was estimated at 12.7 pounds by a Department fisheries biologist. And a 32-inch walleye caught and released from McGregor Dam in Williams County (again, in June) was estimated 13 pounds.

The top five Whopper pike look like this:

- 29 pounds, 8 ounces – Lake Sakakawea.
- 29 pounds, 2 ounces – Devils Lake.
- 29 pounds – Dry Lake (Foster County).
- 27 pounds – Lake Sakakawea.
- 25 pounds – Rice Lake (Emmons County).

For what it's worth III: The 50-inch northern caught and released back into Sakakawea was estimated at 30 pounds. And a 48-inch pike landed and returned to School Section Lake in Rolette County weighed around 26 pounds, 5 ounces, according to estimates.

## Fun Stuff

Game and Fish Department fisheries managers monitor Whopper and Catch and Release club results to a degree, looking for whatever secrets North Dakota's waters are keeping. Sometimes this insight will help biologists better manage a fishery.

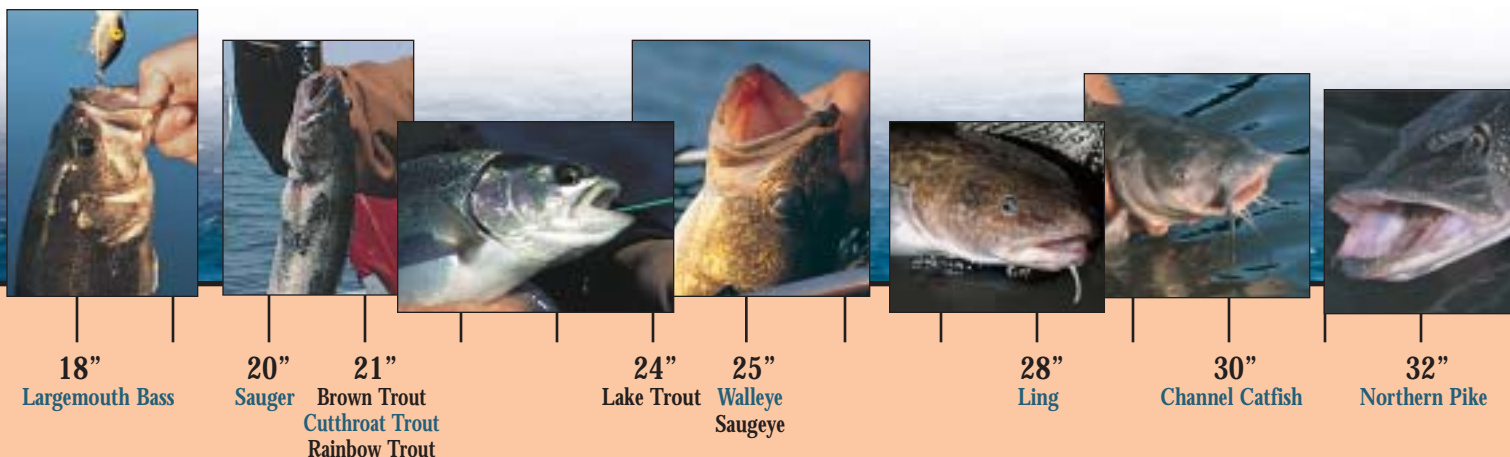
"A lot of what we get from the Whopper report is anecdotal," said Greg Power, Department fisheries division chief. "If you see one or two Whopper fish come out of a small lake, it raises some eyebrows."

Big fish are typically missed during summer netting surveys because of the time of year and the size of mesh biologists use to trap fish. "In June when we do our netting, our gear is good at targeting small- to normal-sized fish that anglers typically catch. We're missing those big fish that show up on the Whopper reports," Power said.

Mostly, Power said, the Whopper report is entertaining. "It's been around forever and I think people enjoy it ... it's fun stuff," he said. "Anglers enjoy looking at and reading about big fish. I do think some anglers do a little homework, see where big fish are coming from and maybe they target those areas."

## The Hunt for Big Fish

If hunting the state's waters for big fish, no matter the species, is your deal, the Department's Whopper and Catch and Release club recordings can be your primer. Let's say you have a thing for big bigmouth buffalo (come on, admit it) but are stumped as to where to begin. Well, according to Whopper recordings, the biggest in 2005, a 27-pound, 6-ounce fish, was caught in the Missouri River. Sure, it's a big river, but it's a place to start, nonetheless.





There are waters you'd expect to give up the biggest Whopper entry for certain species most years. For instance, in 2005 the heaviest largemouth bass, a 5-pound, 5-ounce fish, came from Nelson Lake in Oliver County. This is home of the 8-pound, 7 1/2-ounce state record, and typically kicks out the state's biggest largemouth bass.

Then again, there are some surprises now and again. The top Whopper entries by species for 2005 include:

- Freshwater drum – 8 pounds, 6 ounces, Lake Audubon (McLean County).

- Smallmouth bass – 4 pounds, 11 ounces, Lake Ashtabula (Barnes County).

- Rainbow trout – 7 pounds, 7 ounces, Northgate Dam (Burke County).

- Brown trout – 31 pounds, 11 ounces (state record), Garrison Dam Tailrace (Missouri River).

- Cutthroat trout – 7 pounds, 14 ounces, Missouri River.

- Lake trout – 8 pounds, Lake Sakakawea.

- Chinook salmon – 20 pounds, 7 ounces, Missouri River.

- Yellow perch – 2 pounds, 3 ounces, Green Lake (McIntosh County).

- Bluegill – 2 pounds, 5 ounces, Northgate Dam (Burke County).

- White bass – 4 pounds, 8 ounces, Devils Lake.

- Black crappie – 1 pound, 12 ounces, Devils Lake.

- Crappie – 3 pounds, Brewer Lake (Cass County).

- Muskie – 30 pounds, 8 ounces, GDU Canal Lakes.

- Channel catfish – 20 pounds, 12 ounces, Red River.

- Ling – 13 pounds, 14 ounces, Missouri River.

- Carp – 19 pounds, 5 ounces, James River.

- Black bullhead – 2 pounds, 4 ounces, Sweet Briar Dam (Morton County).

- Paddlefish – 105 pounds, Upper Missouri River.

These are all big fish and deserve the ink they receive. Then again, to some anglers it doesn't matter how big the fish are, which is fine, too.

**RON WILSON** is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

## FISH ADDED

Responding to public concern to further safeguard our fisheries, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department has added six species to its Catch and Release Club program.

The following species and minimum lengths will become part of the Catch and Release program beginning April 1:

- Bluegill – 11 inches.
- Yellow perch – 13 inches.
- Crappie – 13 inches.
- White bass – 16 inches.
- Lake trout – 24 inches.
- Channel catfish – 30 inches.

Before the additions, 12 fish species were eligible for Catch and Release Club recognition. To learn more about Catch and Release and Whopper Club requirements, see the North Dakota Record Fish chart and the text that follows in this issue of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.



CHRIS GRONDAHL

Game and Fish Department started its Catch and Release Club program more than 20 years ago.



40"  
Muskie  
Tiger Muskie

# NORTH DAKOTA RECORD FISH

Species	Weight	Where	When	Angler	Minimum Whopper Weight	Minimum Catch & Release Club
<b>GAME FISH</b>						
Northern Pike	37 lbs. 8 oz.	Sakakawea	1968	M. Slind, Roseglen	20 lbs.	32 inches
Walleye	15 lbs. 12 oz.	Wood Lake	1959	B. Chapman, Minnewaukan	8 lbs.	25 inches
Saugeye	11 lbs. 12 oz.	Sakakawea	1984	David Groth, Williston	8 lbs.	25 inches
Sauger	8 lbs. 12 oz.	Sakakawea	1971	M. Fischer, Chaseley	4 lbs.	20 inches
Yellow Perch	2 lbs. 15 oz.	Devils Lake	1982	Kyle Smith, Carrington	1 3/4 lbs.	13 inches
Bluegill	2 lbs. 12 oz.	Strawberry Lake	1963	B. Hystad, Velva	1 1/2 lbs.	11 inches
Crappie	3 lbs. 4 oz.	Lake Oahe	1998	Don Newcomb, Mandan	1 1/2 lbs.	13 inches
White Bass	4 lbs. 8 oz.	Devils Lake	2000	Jordon Neve, Albert Lea, MN	3 lbs.	16 inches
Largemouth Bass	8 lbs 7 1/2 oz.	Nelson Lake	1983	Leon Rixen, Minot	5 lbs.	18 inches
Smallmouth Bass	5 lbs. 15 oz.	Spiritwood Lake	2003	Roger Haugen, Jamestown	3 lbs.	16 inches
Tiger Muskie	40 lbs.	Gravel Lake	1975	Marvin Lee, Rolette	20 lbs.	40 inches
Muskellunge	46 lbs.	New Johns Lake	2003	Bill Wald, Washburn	20 lbs.	40 inches
Channel Catfish	33 lbs. 4 oz.	Red River	1991	Bruce Pannkuk, Mpls., MN	12 lbs.	30 inches
Ling	18 lbs. 4 oz.	Knife River	1984	O. Kruckenberg, Hazen	8 lbs.	28 inches
Rainbow Trout	21 lbs. 4 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	1998	Wade Weltz, Anamoose	5 lbs.	21 inches
Brown Trout	31 lbs. 11 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	2005	Timmy Johansen, Beulah	5 lbs.	21 inches
Cutthroat Trout	10 lbs. 1 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	2003	Chris Vernon, Bismarck	5 lbs.	21 inches
Lake Trout	14 lbs. 4 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	1982	Allen Leier, Bismarck	5 lbs.	24 inches
Chinook Salmon	31 lbs. 2 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	1986	Tom Schwartz, Beulah	12 lbs.	
Paddlefish	120 lbs.	Missouri River	1993	Brian W. Johnson, Williston	70 lbs.	
<b>NONGAME FISH</b>						
Striped Bass	20 lbs. 12 oz.	Devils Lake	1993	Stephen Renault, Grand Forks		
Whitefish	8 lbs. 11 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	1984	Bill Mitzel, Bismarck	4 lbs.	
Cisco	2 lbs. 8 oz.	Garrison Tailrace	2000	Scott Borup, Jr. and Tylor Borup, Pick City	1 3/4 lbs.	
Flathead Catfish	29 lbs. 6 oz.	Heart River	1985	Kenneth Klein, Bismarck		
Bullhead	4 lbs. 1 oz.	Devils Lake	1988	Riley Zavada, Wolford	2 lbs.	
Drum	26 lbs. 2 oz.	Sakakawea	1988	Larry Harris, Sidney, MT.	6 lbs.	
Buffalo	40 lbs.	Lake Tschida	2002	Trey Opp, Mandan	15 lbs.	
Carp	31 lbs.	Sheyenne River	2003	Austin Loberg, Thompson	15 lbs.	
Goldeye	3 lbs. 13 oz.	New Johns Lake	1998	Craig Unser, Mandan	2 lbs.	

*Whopper Club, Catch and Release Club, and all new state record fish entries must be legally caught on hook and line during the open fishing season.*

## WHOPPER CLUB REQUIREMENTS

Only species listed and meeting minimum weight requirements will qualify for patch and certificate.

All fish entered must have been harvested by legal methods as described in the North Dakota fishing guide and come from North Dakota waters.

Entries must be weighed on scale used in trade. It is not necessary to have fish weighed at official Whopper Club Weigh Station.

An application card must be filled out, giving weight and length of fish, date and where caught, tackle and bait used (if applicable), signature of applicant, and signature of person weighing the fish. Only one application may be made for each species in a lifetime. You receive a patch for the first whopper of a species, an Expert patch for a whopper of another species, and a Master patch for a whopper of a third species. After that only certificates are awarded for whoppers of additional species.

## STATE RECORD REQUIREMENTS

1. All new state record fish must be weighed on a scale used commercially and subject to certification by the Weights and Measures Division, North Dakota Public Service Commission.

2. The catch must be verified by an employee of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

3. A recognizable photo must be furnished to the department.

## CATCH AND RELEASE CLUB REQUIREMENTS

Eighteen species of fish qualify for the Catch and Release Club. Entries must meet minimum length requirements and must be released unharmed back to the water. Another angler must witness and verify the measurement and release.

The angler will receive an official membership certificate and a choice of jacket patch or boat decal. A "FIVE" patch or decal is awarded for each additional five entries.